

STATE NATURE RESOURCES
SENATE NO. 8
DATE 2-19-07
SB 452

February 17, 2007

State Senator Greg Lind
Chairman, State Natural Resources and Energy Committee

Dear Senator Lind,

The Conservation Fund would like to officially register support for Senate Bill SB452 (Working Forests, Ranches, Farms and Watersheds).

Many Montana communities are experiencing significant conversion of working landscapes to subdivision and other development, profoundly changing the landscape and traditional uses. This bill will provide flexibility for the state and local government to respond to communities concerned with these land use changes and to maintain land as working forests, ranches, farms and watersheds.

Montana is following national trends that indicate more than 44 million acres of private forestland will be sold over the next 25 years in this nation, and 10 million acres have traded hands over the last 3 years alone.

Loss of working lands diminishes wildlife habitat, access for hunting, fishing, and recreation, closure of snowmobile trails, impacts water resources, and changes the local economies. Local communities are losing the ranching, farming, and forestry way of life, affecting local economies, banks, stores and the work force.

This bill creates a statewide loan and grant based funding mechanism for protecting and maintaining working lands, including forest and agricultural lands that are actively and sustainably managed to produce goods and services.

By investing state funds and developing partnerships in land conservation today, we have the opportunity to leverage more public and private money to protect working lands.

Nearly every Montanan would benefit from this bill. The forestry community would benefit by keeping the most productive working forests producing timber. That means jobs to manage forests and wood products to keep sawmills running. The agricultural community would benefit by keeping farms and ranches producing crops and livestock. That means jobs, family enterprises, and maintaining a way of life.

Your support and leadership in obtaining success for this measure would greatly be appreciated.

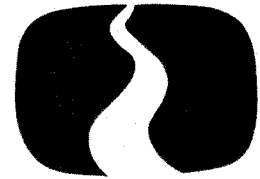
With respect,

Gates Watson
Montana State Director
The Conservation Fund

February 15, 2007

State Senator Greg Lind
Chairman, Senate Natural Resources and Energy Committee
Helena, Montana

BITTER ROOT



LAND TRUST

117 North 4th Street, Ste 2A
Hamilton, Montana 59840

www.bitterrootlandtrust.org

RE: Support for Working Landscapes Bill

Dear Mr. Lind,

On behalf of the Bitter Root Land Trust Board of Directors and staff, I write to express our support for Senate Bill No. 452, the "Working Landscapes Bill" proposed by Senator Carol Williams.

In November 2006 Ravalli County voters elected to invest \$10 Million of their money into the permanent protection of Ravalli County's remaining privately held working lands. In the past thirty years, residents of our county watched as more than 41,000 acres of privately held land on our valley floor were converted from working lands into developed subdivisions. These were lands that buffered our rivers and streams, sheltered elk, deer, and other wildlife, and put food on our families' dining room tables.

Without question, the growth associated with this loss of open land also had tangible community benefits, including a strengthened economy. However, we know from recent study at the University of Montana's O'Conner Center for the Rocky Mountain West that our strengthened economy is tied very much to the quality of life benefits afforded by our working landscape. It is clear to us that conserving our open lands in a context of well-planned growth, protects both our vital natural resources and our vibrant economy.

The Working Landscapes Bill is a great way for Montana's Legislature to acknowledge counties like Gallatin, Missoula, and Ravalli where citizens are choosing a future that protects Montana's unique natural resources. The Working Landscapes Bill is a great way for the State of Montana to partner with such communities in protecting Montana's rich working forests, ranches, farms, and watersheds. Finally, the Working Landscapes Bill is a great way for all Montanans to leverage one another's investment in our state's strongest asset, forever protecting our legacy of clean water, wildlife habitat, and working farms and ranches.

We look forward to the many lasting benefits that all Montanans will realize with the passage of Senate Bill No. 452.

Sincerely,

Grant Kier
Executive Director



Testimony On
SB 452: WORKING FORESTS, RANCHES, FARMS, AND WATERSHEDS

Natural Resources Committee
Senator Greg Lind, Chairman

February 16, 2007

Mr. Chairman,

The Gallatin Valley Land Trust (GVLТ) is a private nonprofit organization dedicated to the conservation of private lands and the creation of trails in a five-county region of Southwestern Montana.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 452: Working Forests, Ranches, and Watersheds Program. GVLТ urges the committee to **support** SB 452 as introduced, and to move it expeditiously to the Senate for consideration.

Many Montana communities are experiencing significant conversion of working landscapes to subdivision and other development. In Gallatin County, the pace of land development has increased dramatically. Developed land grew by 20% in just 5 years, resulting in the permanent conversion of 15,000 acres including some of Montana's best agricultural soils. This bill is important to the state of Montana because it will help keep traditional land uses like agriculture and forestry in practice, and will conserve our wildlife habitat, water resources, and viewsheds.

When enacted, this bill will directly or indirectly benefit nearly every person in Montana by:

- Helping to **keep Montana's economic, cultural, and ecological heritage intact**, including timber production and working farms and ranches;
- **Providing flexibility for state and local governments** to respond to land use change and determine their own futures;
- **Protecting access to land and trails** for recreation, hunting, and fishing;
- **Leveraging public and private funds** for working landscapes, including county open space bonds, such as Gallatin County's \$20 million open space bonds, and other matching grant programs for land conservation.

Recently, the Gallatin Valley Land Trust helped the Oyler family place a conservation easement on their ranch outside of Manhattan. The project includes public access to a section of the Gallatin River and conserves important wetlands, along with the Oyler's working ranch. In order to make a conservation easement work for this ranch, five sources of funding were cobbled together. Senate bill 452 would help families like the Oylers by providing more flexibility, increased incentive, and added options to protect their land from subdivision and development.

GVLТ welcomes any questions you may have and sincerely offers any assistance we may be able to provide as you work to protect Montana's great resources, its rich heritage and its bright future. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Stephen Johnson
Executive Director